

The Murder



FOR a few moments silence hung like a black, dead weight between the two men. They were separated merely by the width of an ordinary library table; and it would seem that the thin little man sitting in a chair should have been afraid of the face that bent toward him. It was filled with fierce rage, and belonged to a young, powerful man.

But the little man smiled, in the dark, crooked way he had of showing his unconcern and his complete hold on the situation. It was not a pleasant smile. It lacked the wholesome element of mirth, and the visage that formed its background was much too dusky and evil. It was a curiously bizarre face, exotic, swarthy, lighted by black eyes that glowed with a cruel, sinister quality. This man was young also, but his strength was mental. His hair was straight and sleekly black, and though he was garbed with careful and fastidious concession to the styles of American civilization, it was easy to see that his origins and his system of thought were indissolubly linked with strange, far-away lands of mystery and intrigue. A dangerous man, if his purposes were dangerous, for he had the will and the intelligence to carry them out.

The table was strewn with newspaper clippings. Some were large, and topped by lurid headlines. Others were smaller, some even tiny, of a paragraph or two. All were upon the same subject, differing considerably in detail, as though the subject had taken many turns and twistings,

and the range of them covered approximately a year. It was easy to see that these clippings had been the object of examination.

Arthur Seagrove stood on the other side of the table. There was a chair behind him, from which he had just risen. His hands gripped the ends of the table. He bent forward. In those few moments laden with ominous silence, sheer rage flamed on his face. Then this became mingled with a flicker of impotence, and some of the threat passed away. He relaxed his grip on the table, and a slight droop crept into his shoulders.

"I'm wondering," he said in a slow, husky voice, "whether to throw you out or call the police."

The man in the chair shrugged.

"As you wish," he said, and again smiled with unconcern. He added, speaking very careful and exact English, as a tongue acquired through diligent study by a man seeking perfection in it: "But do not forget, sir, what these newspaper articles say. I have tempted many men to call the police. Some have yielded to the temptation. One died while he was at the telephone, as you have just read. The others—well, one day, two days, three days they lived. But they died. The police could not save them. Now you, sir, are very young and very rich. I cannot believe that you want to die."

"I—I'm not going to die. I'm going to get you—you and your mob. You've got to come to the end of your rope sometime. You can't keep this thing up successfully. You've got hold of the wrong man this time!"

It was plain to see that Arthur Seagrove did not believe his own brave words. That fact would not be lost upon even a stupid man, and his visitor was far from stupid.

"I shall not interfere if you wish to go to the telephone, Mr. Seagrove. I shall sit exactly where I am."

Seagrove stared at him. He sat down and began to finger the clippings again, scowling at them. He ran the fingers of one hand through his thick brown hair. It was a very strong-looking hand. Only two years had elapsed since Arthur Sea-

Master

grove's name appeared frequently in the newspapers as that of a star college athlete. But he was up against a game now in which all his college training, in classroom and on the field, seemed weak and futile.

"I don't understand how you get by with it," he said presently, impressed, bewildered. "It certainly beats me! Right here in New York! I've been reading these things in the papers from time to time for a year. I couldn't believe it, and still I did believe it. It's absurd!"

His words only emphasized his bewilderment.

"And you never thought that some day you would receive a call from us. Very strange, Mr. Seagrove—is it not?"

Seagrove looked up. The sharp, grim look had come again.

"Which one of these are you?" he demanded. "In these murder stories there are several names mentioned. Which one of the mob are you?"

"I am Heri-Moo," the visitor replied placidly, somewhat proudly, adding with a slight bow of the head: "Heri-Moo, at your service, sir."

Seagrove ignored the mocking irony of the offer. He scanned the clippings for the name of Heri-Moo, and found it in several places, prominently—even in some of the headlines.

"Heri-Moo, eh?" he remarked. "Well, you've been a pretty busy individual in the last year, Heri-Moo, with all the stealing and murdering you've been up to. Now supposing I grab you by the throat right now, and twist your neck till your tongue hangs out—slam you on the floor maybe, and call the police. Where do you suppose you might finish, eh—Heri-Moo?"

Heri-Moo made no audible rejoinder. He merely shrugged, but the shrug was rejoinder enough. It told of his indifference to threats.

"I guess maybe you'd finish in the electric chair—eh, Heri-Moo?"

The little man shook his head.

"Possibly," he rejoined, "if you were able to perform the various feats you suggest. I do not mean, sir, to reflect upon your physical strength, nor to boast of

The amazing story of a strange Oriental criminal who struck terror to the heart of a great American city, and of the exciting event which preceded his ultimate defeat.

By

ROY L. HINDS

Illustrated by Joseph Maturco

my own. I would be helpless in your hands. I am a very small man, and I learned early in life that one so lacking in bodily strength should train his intellect, if he is to meet strong men upon equal terms. I acknowledge your superiority in one way, but must remind you of my superiority in another. I refer you to the clipping—I think you have it in your hand—about the man who died at the telephone."

THE bewildered look returned to Seagrove's face. He looked down at the clipping, and began to rumple his hair again.

"Well, you got the best of him some way," he admitted. "At the telephone—they found him on the floor."

"With no marks of violence upon him," Heri-Moo suggested.

"Yes, that's right. No marks of violence."

"And no poison was found in his body."

"Yes, that's right. That's still a mystery. How did you kill that fellow, Heri-Moo?"

"I did not have to wait until he got to the telephone," the visitor said. "I could have accomplished my purpose any moment before, just as I could with you at this moment. But I gave him a chance. I thought he might change his mind, even after he took the receiver from its hook. I gave him all the chance I could. It was only when he asked the operator to send the police that I acted."

"How?"

"Pardon me for not being more explicit."

"Do you mean to say that you can kill me as we sit here?"

"I can."

"Without shooting me, or throwing a knife at me—or something like that?"

"Very early in our conversation," Heri-Moo suggested, "I placed you more at ease by assuring you that I have no such weapon on my person. I exhibited my pockets to you."

Seagrove nodded. He remembered also that this singular individual had not once permitted him to get within arm's-reach. When the conversation opened, they were standing. If Seagrove moved closer, Heri-Moo moved away. He had been careful to keep the table between them.

The newspaper clippings, which refreshed Arthur Seagrove's mind upon the sinister plot involving fortunes in money and human life, chronicled in the papers for a year, were weighty evidence. A man alone in an apartment, even his own apartment, with Heri-Moo, would be a fool to fly into the face of that evidence. Not one of the "corsair murders," as they were called, had been solved. Not a man implicated in one of them had ever been found. Nothing had been found except the bodies of the victims—and a few days after each tragedy, a letter to the police confessing the crime, and signed: "*Jitli, the Corsair of Manhattan.*"

THERE had been four of these murders within a year. There had been nineteen cases in which the victims paid the ransom demanded by Jitli, and thereby escaped with their lives. Nothing ever appeared in the newspapers about these latter cases until the ransom had been paid and Jitli and his crew vanished into safety.

The record was impressive. Arthur Seagrove hardly ventured to follow his impulses.

"Now I'll tell you what I'll do," Seagrove suggested. "I shall keep quiet about your visit to me—absolutely, as you warned me—if you will send this fellow Jitli here to see me."

"Jitli never makes calls," said Heri-Moo.

"You're afraid I'll get him here, and have police planted in the apartment, eh?"

"You could not do that, sir. Jitli would not enter the apartment unless

you were alone in it. And you would never get out of it alive if you had arranged for help to arrive after he came."

Seagrove shook his head, and set his lips grimly. When he opened them it was to say:

"You fellows have certainly got murder down to a fine art. I believe what you say. I can't help believing it. What do you do—get on a fellow's trail and never leave it until he pays or dies?"

"We take numerous precautions, sir."

"Are all these fellows of the same tribe?"

"Tribe!" Heri-Moo rejoined, indignantly. "Ours is not a tribe, sir. We come from a very ancient civilization, and were practicing the sciences and the arts while your respected forefathers were savages. You are in error, sir."

"Well, I mean, are you all of the same race?"

"We are descendants of ancient kings, sir—as Jitli has confessed in his letters to the police, which you may read in the clippings."

"And you have mysterious ways of killing men—without violence, without leaving a trace of poison in their systems?"

"Again I refer you to the clippings, sir."

Seagrove meditated. He was quite cool. It would pay him to be so. If the astounding proposals and threats of Heri-Moo had not been backed up by the record provided in the clippings, it is likely that he would have gone to his death in his own apartment. But the modern piratical plots of Jitli had had the city talking for a year. This threat was deadly serious. Seagrove dropped the clippings he had been fussing with, and leaned forward, his elbows on the table.

"And you say that Jitli never makes calls?"

"Never. He leads a very indolent life, sir. His humble servants, of whom I am one, attend to his affairs."

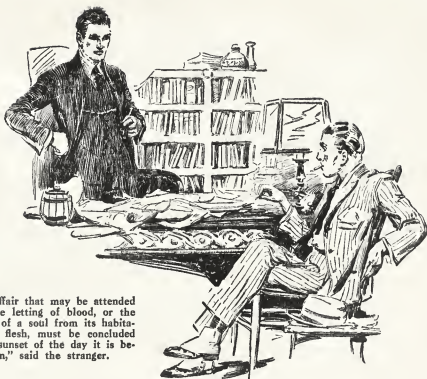
"How long am I to have for a decision upon your demands?"

"Until sunset, sir."

"It is now twenty minutes past two."

"Yes sir—twenty minutes past two. The sun will set on this summer's evening at exactly thirteen minutes past seven. You have until that time."

"Supposing I'm a few minutes late?" Seagrove inquired, very much intrigued, despite the precariousness of his position, by the exact, precise plans and operations of the sinister Jitli.



"Any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood, or the release of a soul from its habitation of flesh, must be concluded before sunset of the day it is begun," said the stranger.

"At fourteen minutes past seven," said Heri-Moo, "your life would be declared forfeit by my master—and nothing could save it. At any moment thereafter his wrath might descend."

"You don't mean to say that he'd have a fellow killed if he was a minute late in giving his decision—if he agreed to pay, and did pay!"

"He would have no other choice, sir. If he defied the fates by extending your time limit, they would take their revenge upon him."

"Yes? Well, I don't pretend to understand—"

"I shall explain, sir. It is an ancient legend among our people that any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood or the release of a soul from its habitation of flesh must be concluded, or at least the bargain closed, before sunset of the day upon which it is begun."

SEAGROVE gazed attentively at this man who talked of murder as casually and nonchalantly as he might have discussed the sale of a painting.

Seagrove watched the man's hands. They were long-fingered, and seemed to crawl about the arms of the chair like insects. He must have something in one of his pockets that could be jerked out

instantly and put into action—or up one of his sleeves. He thought of some device which might spray a deadly liquid into an assailant's face. But all this was conjecture. And Heri-Moo was watching him every moment. Despite a general air of security and relaxation, there was a subtle tenseness in the man.

Seagrove continued to toy with the clippings as he cudgled his brain for some device by which he could match cunning with cunning. But he felt painfully helpless. He did, however, manage to work one of the clippings toward the edge of the table.

"It is not necessary for me to remind you," said Heri-Moo, "that it is now twenty-five minutes past two."

"Well, yes—what of it?"

"Your bank will close at three, sir."

"You demand payment today? I thought you said that if I gave you my decision by sunset that would be sufficient."

"If your decision is favorable, you should have the money on your person, sir: fifty thousand dollars. It is quite easy for you to telephone the bank to send that amount to your apartment and that you will give the messenger a check for it. I understand that you have often made large withdrawals in that manner, from your apartment here."

"How do you know that?"

"It is true. I know, sir. You will pardon me if I go to the telephone with you, to hear what you have to say. It is important that I take a precaution against marked bills. It is important also that the bills be delivered to you while I am here, no note to be larger than a hundred dollars."

"No, I shall not do it that way. Before sunset," Seagrove promised, "I shall give you a decision one way or the other. If I decide to pay, I can get the money tomorrow—"

Heri-Moo made a significant gesture toward the clippings.

"The men who opposed my suggestions," he said, "were unfortunate, as you may read. I have told you my wishes, sir."

Seagrove had never seen a more terrible face than that which now confronted him. He had to choose—obey or fight. Four men had chosen to fight. Four men had died.

"All right," he said, and got up.

They went into the foyer, Seagrove in the lead. Heri-Moo kept out of the big man's reach. He stood idly while Seagrove telephoned the bank.

"Be very careful of the inflections of your voice," said Heri-Moo. "There must not be the slightest trace of nervousness or alarm in it. You can manage that. I can see that you are a man of courage, and can control your nerves if you wish. I say this for your protection—for if the bank should become suspicious and send some one here to investigate, I should have no choice but to escape. I should have to remove you and whomever the bank might send. Careful now—just a straight business call."

Seagrove obeyed.

BACK in the sitting-room of his suite, he wrote a check for fifty thousand dollars.

"I'm not going to pay you when the money comes," he said. "I must have time for thought. You must return for a decision."

"Very well, sir."

Heri-Moo's acquiescence to this proposal was a relief. Seagrove suggested that he would have his answer at seven o'clock; and strangely, the guest agreed readily to return to the apartment at that time. It was bewildering—the calm assurance of the man against a possibility of Seagrove's getting in touch with a

friend and warning him of his predicament!

Heri-Moo examined the check, however, to see that no note had been written on it. The signature was steadily accurate. Seagrove had been warned that the conspirators had a specimen of his signature, and that Heri-Moo had studied it carefully.

Heri-Moo did not come close to take the check from him. He ordered that it be laid upon the table and that Seagrove withdraw a little. Then he picked it up. And all the while Heri-Moo kept on top of the litter of clippings the one about the man who was stricken dead at his telephone. There was a picture of the victim in that clipping. It was a constant reminder for implicit obedience.

The bank called Seagrove back on the telephone, as is customary in transactions of that sort, to verify the fact that the call for the money had really come from him and not from some crook who schemed to waylay the messenger. . . .

The messenger came with the money. "Of course," Heri-Moo had said just before, "even if you should trap me, do you think that would save your life? No, no! It would only insure your death, sir. Jitli would not rest until he had taken his revenge."

The messenger had gone away without having seen Heri-Moo, who, during the brief transaction, observed things from the bedroom, the door of which he kept slightly open. Seagrove had been told where to stand, so that his face would be constantly visible to Heri-Moo, with the messenger's back to the bedroom.

Neither on the telephone or during his brief business with the messenger had Arthur Seagrove given the slightest hint that he had fallen into the hands of that master of murder who had been called the Corsair of Manhattan.

"You will gather up my clippings for me, please," said Heri-Moo.

Seagrove did so—put the clippings into their envelope, all except one, which he had managed to slide beneath the table scarf.

Heri-Moo thrust the envelope into his pocket. He lingered a few minutes, to reiterate many of his warnings, and to leave various instructions.

"Remember," was one thing he said, "that every gentleman who has been approached by Jitli has paid—or died. They were shrewd, intelligent men. They tried various tricks. None succeeded. They paid—or died."

Then he departed, smiling the crooked smile that had no more of laughter in it than might be found in the grimace of a hangman.

CHAPTER II

ARTHUR SEAGROVE hastened back from the door to the living-room. His simple ruse, whether anything came of it or not, had worked. He had the one clipping of all that bunch that he wanted—one no more than half a column in length, and with a one-column head on it.

Eagerly, Seagrove studied the slip of printed paper.

On the reverse side there was part of an advertisement, with white spaces in it. In a couple of these spaces some one had drawn designs with a pencil.

These designs resembled nothing so much as crude attempts to draw a wagon-wheel; yet as the young man studied them closely, he realized that they did not represent attempts at all. They were the careless results of a man's meditations over an outspread paper, with a pencil in his hand.

The individual who held that pencil had only a subconscious idea of what he was doing with it. His mind was upon more weighty projects. He may have been talking with some one. He may have been sitting alone, thinking. The white spaces of the advertisement lay before him. His fingers held a lead pencil. Casually, he drew a circle. Then he drew lines from one edge of the circle to the other, with the result that spokes were formed in the wheel. Then, in the very center where the straight lines crossed, he had drawn a small circle and filled it in—the hub of the wheel. Before he had finished, he had drawn at least one more of these designs. A man preoccupied. It was a slim clue—yet the hand of the Murder Master himself, the ringleader of that redoubtable band, may have held the pencil.

A very slim clue—but a man fighting for his life clutches at straws.

And Seagrove *was* fighting for his life. He had made up his mind to fight. He would not pay the fifty-thousand-dollar ransom demanded by the Murder Master's agent, Heri-Moo.

Seagrove rumbled his hair, and gazed into the street, in an effort to spot some individual who might be watching the house and his windows. The apartment

house was in East Sixty-fourth Street, close to Central Park. Across the street there was a row of private dwellings and other apartment houses. There was no one loitering in the street. What persons were visible were on the move, and seemed paying no attention whatever to Art Seagrove's windows.

It was now half-past three.

Seagrove came to a pause at the table, and he gazed at the open parcel of bank-notes, which he had checked over as soon as Heri-Moo departed. There were one thousand bank-notes in the package, but he had not counted them individually. They were assembled in small packets, and each packet bore a paper binder on which was printed the amount it contained. There were three one-hundred-dollar bills, two hundred of fifty dollars each, and twenty-dollar bills to the number of five hundred. Fifty thousand dollars!

Heri-Moo had seen the package of money, yet he had made only a rather indifferent suggestion that it be turned over to him at once! He had not demanded it. His only demands had been that Seagrove get the money from the bank and that he decide whether or not to pay before sundown!

IT was strange indeed. Seagrove had been left alone, with his money intact. He could easily telephone for the police or to friends. He could make any number of moves within the next two or three hours to circumvent the Murder Master.

But could he? That mental question was a stiff jolt to his nerves. The fact that he had been left alone, in his own apartment, unbound, with a telephone, and able to leave the house if he wished, hinted at precautions already taken to keep help from reaching him.

And yet—four men had attempted to outwit the Murder Master. And four men had died.

Many others had met his demands, and then complained to the police. It was difficult to say how many had paid their ransoms and kept quiet about it, still terrified. Of these there would be no mention in the newspapers.

"But I won't pay," Seagrove told himself, "and I won't die. There must be some way to beat that mob! If I pay and keep still about it, it's just one more incident in the life of the Corsair, as he calls himself. If I complain to the police, the newspapers will have me down as another victim who was unwilling to

fight him—afraid. The only thing to do is *not* to pay—*fight!*"

In this resolve, he forgot nothing of what he had read—the newspaper description of this arch-criminal as the most ruthless and successful rogue who had operated in America since the pirates left the Spanish Main was not an overstatement. For a solid year the Murder Master had taken his toll in wealth and life.

His method of slaying was beyond the most active imagination. The most skillful surgeons and diagnosticians in the city had performed autopsies on the bodies of the four men who had paid with their lives. They had found the cause of death, each time, but the manner in which that cause was set into motion was a dark and terrible mystery.

An embolism. That had been the verdict in all four cases. A clot, a sudden solidification of a sufficient quantity of blood in a vein to obstruct the valvular action of the heart when the clot reached that organ. In all four cases this had wrought death.

IN the first instance, when the first victim of the Corsair died thus in a subway train, the casualty had been set down as a natural death—although he had uttered a terrified yell just preceding his collapse. This was unusual in a case of embolism, for the victim of it who is stricken naturally is dead without pain or warning that any thing is wrong with him. The cry had not been explained, though later, in the light of developments, it was assumed that before he was stricken he caught sight of one of his pursuers, in that crowded subway car, but had been unable to point to or indicate in any manner the man who had frightened him.

The autopsy revealed the clot, the embolism.

This man had informed the police of the demands that had been made upon him. The police had assumed that death by a gunshot or stabbing would be attempted, if any attempt were made; and there had been a police guard in the man's office and in his home. A policeman accompanied him, in plain clothes, in his business trips about the city.

But the Murder Master had got his man—got him apparently without a direct movement against him, and so stealthily that no one in the subway car noticed an untoward action on the part of any passenger. There was no mark found upon the man's body.

When the second victim of the Corsair was found dead at his telephone, it was from embolism again, with absolutely no sign of its having come about from any but natural causes.

The third man died in the crowded lobby of a theater. He, like the first, had cried out. Again it was assumed that his horror-stricken gaze had lighted upon the man he knew would attempt to kill him, but that the slayer performed his terrible deed instantly thereafter. Embolism again.

The medical fraternity could not solve the mystery. They could name poisons which, taken internally or by injection, would cause solidifying of the blood, the production of innumerable clots, but they could not suggest a poison that would cause merely one tiny clot to form and thereafter leave no trace of its having been swallowed or injected.

"When it is my wish to strike," said Jitli in a letter, "no man may stay my hand. Death is a servant at my command. I summon him. I direct him. I bid him lay his cold finger upon my enemies. Unseen, unheard, unfelt, he strikes—a gentle touch. Perhaps only the pointing of a finger. Who shall say? A beckoning, perhaps, seen only by the man he calls. None may deny it. None may avoid it."

The mysterious and devastating embolism developed in the veins of the fourth victim in his own home, while he was alone with Heri-Moo, whose name was often mentioned in the letters of Jitli the Murder Master. The only evidence of a struggle was an overturned chair, but Heri-Moo may have upset that in his rush out of the room after the murder. From what had gone before in respect to the other victims, it was readily believed that Heri-Moo had been able to inflict death without a fight.

Arthur Seagrove was distressingly aware of all these facts when he made his decision not to pay but to fight. But—"If I don't pay," he reflected, "they will keep in touch with me. Yes, indeed—they'll keep in touch with me!"

"If I pay them," he continued reasoning, "they will simply withdraw again, and I should never get a trace of them. I'll keep them after me—but I must see to it that they don't get too close."

Arthur Seagrove was wealthy, by inheritance. He was young, and untainted in a business way. He had just returned from a trip around the world of more than a year's duration, follow-

ing his graduation from a university. There were several business prospects that he was considering, connections with financial concerns, but none pressing.

He set his lips tightly together. He walked to the windows and gazed down into the street. It was four-thirty now.

The sun would set at thirteen minutes past seven. Heri-Moo had evidently con-

together for six months in Paris and Rome, where Julia had gone with her mother. The Moores had returned to America. Seagrove had gone east, on his trip around the world.

Julia had been rather indifferent toward him since his return to New York. She liked men who did things. . . .

Apart from the death of his father and then the death of his mother, Arthur Seagrove had faced no really serious fact



sulted an almanac. It was a precise detail calculated to impress a prospective victim.

"Any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood or the release of a soul from its habitation of flesh must be concluded, or at least the bargain closed, before sunset of the day upon which it is begun." So Heri-Moo had said.

CHAPTER III

GRADUALLY there came to Seagrove, as he wandered about the apartment trying to think out an effective plan, an enthusiasm for the adventure.

Hitherto Seagrove had lived a care-free existence. He had too much money for a man of his temperament. That was how Julia Moore expressed it.

Seagrove was sure that he loved Julia Moore. He had met her during his college days, and later they were thrown

"If the cops ever found this dough on me, I'd go up fer life! —What're you lookin' at me so funny fer—uh?"

in life until Heri-Moo walked into his apartment. Abroad, whenever the New York papers reached him, he had read of Jitli and Heri-Moo and their diabolical operations. He could hardly help reading it. The papers had been full of it.

And now that he found himself opposing the Murder Master and his crew, some grim, stubborn element in his make-up came to the surface for the first time.

"At least," he mused, as he dressed carefully for the expedition he contemplated, "I've got something to do now. I've got a real job on my hands."

He was surprised that the cashier at the bank, with whom he had talked when asking that the fifty thousand dollars be sent to his apartment, and who was something of a personal friend, had not remonstrated with him. He had made several similar withdrawals, since returning to New York, but none had been

for more than five thousand dollars; the cashier must have thought that Seagrove planned a furious plunge into some gambling game. Yet he had not uttered his usual words of caution.

"I suppose he's disgusted with me," was Seagrove's thought—"as Julia is. Well, I've got to see Julia before I step into this thing."

He hesitated to telephone. Yet the idea that the Murder Master and his gang had any means of listening in on his private telephone was preposterous. He did not even have to call through the apartment-house switchboard.

He had decided, however, not to make a single move until he had a carefully laid plan in mind. He had it now.

He was dressed very plainly. Into his wall safe he put his watch and jewelry. In a small leather case he put the fifty thousand dollars.

"Maybe Heri-Moo is the Murder Master, and not just one of the gang," he reflected. "Nobody has ever seen the 'Corsair.' Perhaps he's a mythical figure shoved in by Heri-Moo for effect. There are other nutty names mentioned in the papers. There may be a gang—or there may be just one man who has created the illusion of a gang. Other names appear in Jitli's letters, but it's Heri-Moo who's the most prominent."

AT length he went to his telephone and lifted the receiver. And his call went through without difficulty.

"Julia," he said, "I've got to see you this evening."

"But I have another appointment, Arthur."

"Yes, that's what you've told me every time I've called lately. But this is important, Julia. It's probably the most important thing that ever happened to me—and I've got to tell you about it."

"What is it, Arthur?"

"Can't talk about it on the phone, but if you can see me for half an hour this evening—say at eight-thirty—well, I won't bother you again, at least for a while."

"But that is an awkward time. I was going to the theater."

"Well, I don't like to ask you to break an engagement—and wouldn't if there was any other way out of it. Something big has happened to me, Julia. If you don't see me this evening, you may never see me again."

"Are you going away?"

"Don't know. Don't know what's go-

ing to happen to me from one minute to another, and—"

"Arthur, have you had too many cocktails?"

"I swear I'm sober, Julia! Not a single one today."

"You do sound awfully sane, and serious, but I can't imagine what's happened."

"That isn't all of it, Julia. You wouldn't be able to imagine in a thousand years. Now, I can't come to your house. You'll have to meet me out somewhere, not in any crowd, or where anyone else is around. Say, in the park somewhere—and it must be after dark. Between eight-thirty and nine. It's unusual, I know, Julia—but there's a good reason for it."

There was an earnestness in his tone not to be mistaken. She made the appointment—a quarter to nine, on the walk just east of Cleopatra's Needle, in Central Park.

"And you *must* come alone," he insisted before she hung up.

Presently Seagrove went to his telephone again. The man he meant to call lived with his family in the basement of the apartment-house—the superintendent. Seagrove looked up his number in the directory, and got him on the wire, preferring that method to using the house phone in the hall.

He asked the superintendent to come to his apartment as quickly as he could, but indirectly.

"I'll explain it all when you get up here," he said. "I'm on the fourth floor. Ride in the elevator up to about the sixth, and then walk down to the fourth. If anyone sees you—that is, anyone you don't know—in the halls, don't come to my door until you're sure you are not observed."

"Yes sir. All right, Mr. Seagrove."

In a few minutes the superintendent entered Seagrove's apartment. Yes, he was certain that no one had seen him on any of the floors. No, he had not seen at any time any strangers loitering about who might be watching the house.

"I have a strange request to make," said Seagrove. "Is there any way I can get out of this house without being seen?"

"Well, that depends on who's watching you, and where they might be—if there is anyone watching you."

He studied the young man curiously.

"You know me well enough," Seagrove suggested, "to feel quite sure that I'm not trying to dodge the police, and that

you won't get into any trouble by helping me."

"Certainly, Mr. Seagrove. I am not worrying about that."

"All right. Now, this is a private affair that I shall have to be excused from explaining. But I need your help. I've got to get out of the house in a way that no one will see me leaving it—after dark preferably. And I've got to get out of *this* apartment now. Could I go down to your apartment and stay there until dark?"

"Why, certainly."

And so that end of it was arranged. Carrying the case containing the fifty thousand dollars, Seagrove rode down to the basement in an elevator operated by the superintendent himself, who sent the elevator-boy on an errand.

This circumstance was a deep mystery to the superintendent and his wife, yet they asked no questions. The young man spent the time agreeably enough—and he and the superintendent framed up what Seagrove was sure was a certain device of avoiding being seen upon his departure.

SEVEN o'clock arrived. Now Heri-Moo would be at his door to keep the appointment, to get Seagrove's answer. He would slip upstairs, as he had before, while the elevator-boy, who was also the hall attendant and operated the switchboard, was busy elsewhere. Heri-Moo would ring Seagrove's doorbell. . . .

In any event, Arthur Seagrove would be chalked down as man Number Five to suffer that mysterious death.

Seagrove watched the clock on the mantel. His own watch was in his wall safe. He wanted no expensive jewelry on his person, and had dressed in the oldest and darkest suit he had.

The minutes crept by. Ten, eleven, twelve minutes past seven. Thirteen! Sundown!

He could not change his mind now. Even if he could find Heri-Moo and hand him the fifty thousand dollars, it was too late to save his life. That was now declared forfeit.

"Any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood—"

Well, it was past sundown.

Sitting down to have dinner as a guest of the household, Seagrove drew a sigh of relief. He was pitted against the Corsair of Manhattan now, and was glad that all the waverings and uncertainties of the afternoon had been resisted.

At twenty minutes past eight the superintendent left the apartment, and sent the elevator boy out. Operating the elevator himself, he took Seagrove to the top floor. No one was in sight there. He hid Seagrove and his small leather case in a closet, then he ran the elevator back down to the first floor, and left it there. Then he walked up the long distance to the top, slowly, but he was out of breath when he got there.

The coast was clear, and he led Seagrove to the roof. Over the tops of five apartment houses they went, until they came to the one they sought. The superintendent of this building was a friend of Seagrove's conductor, and he was waiting for them. He escorted Seagrove downstairs in order that the young man might not be mistaken for a prowler.

This house was on a corner, and from it Seagrove was enabled to get into the throngs of the avenue without having shown his face in the cross-street on which his own house fronted.

Speedily, he walked away. After a block or two he got a taxicab and rode to the park gate nearest Cleopatra's Needle.

He walked into the park. Julia Moore should appear on the walk near the Needle at a quarter of nine, but she was not in sight. Seagrove wandered up and down, waiting. There were very few pedestrians abroad, though a few people sat on benches around the famous Egyptian monument at the top of the knoll.

It had never occurred to him that Julia might fail to keep the appointment.

But an hour went by, with no sign of her.

Brooding on his disappointment, nervous at the approach of every pedestrian, sizing every man up as a possible emissary of the Murder Master, it was almost ten o'clock when Seagrove snapped into action. It seemed a certainty now that Julia had broken the appointment, and he walked out of the park, carrying the fortune in the little leather case.

He got into a taxicab, and gave directions to Fourteenth Street and Third Avenue. So far as he could make out, he had not been shadowed at any time. Disconsolate, he looked back frequently, studying the occupants of vehicles behind. He watched faces in the street.

At the corner where he left the taxi he stepped into a phone-booth, and called the Moore house.

The word came that Julia was not there. He asked for her mother.

"Why," she exclaimed when he ex-

plained his call to her, "she went out to keep an appointment with you, Arthur. She should be home; I thought she was with you."

"What time did she leave, Mrs. Moore?"

"She was late leaving—afraid she might miss you; five or ten minutes late, she said. It's very strange!"

"Perhaps she went on to the theater," he suggested, trying to calm the mother.

"Oh, she wouldn't do that!" Mrs. Moore insisted. "She wasn't dressed for the theater."

"Listen, Mrs. Moore—I'm sure everything is all right. Please don't worry. I shall look for her." He tried to say this encouragingly, but hadn't the faintest idea of where to begin such a hunt, except to call a few mutual friends. "I'll call you back every few minutes, until we locate her."

"Yes, do, Arthur—please!"

A number of telephone-calls failed to bring a trace of Julia. Her mother was frantically calling friends also.

Julia had vanished!

CHAPTER IV

BY midnight the hope in Seagrove's heart had ebbed to a low point.

He knew that the police should be notified. At twelve o'clock Mrs. Moore knew it also, yet despite her fears she had the natural aversion of a wealthy and exclusive woman to calling in the police, horrified at the thought of lurid headlines in the papers.

Over the phone Seagrove told Mrs. Moore that he was leaving to continue the search, and advised her to ask advice better than his—named an elderly lawyer and his wife, close friends of the Moores, and urged her to ask them to come to her. She said she would.

Seagrove then set about executing the plans he had in mind before the astounding disappearance of Julia Moore. He went back to the vicinity of Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street. Near by was a small hotel he had noticed several times, a quiet family hotel wherein people of moderate means made their homes. He engaged a room, paying a week in advance, and registered under an assumed name. He went up to the room, which, he was glad to observe, was clean and comfortable. There he had meant to go into hiding, and to set himself to the task of unearthing the Corsair's lair.

But what he should do now depended altogether on developments concerning Julia Moore.

He put the money-case in the closet. There was no place in the room where the money could be easily hidden, and he had no time for elaborate preparations.

He locked his door, put the key in his pocket and went again into the streets. It was nearly one o'clock. Agonizing thoughts of what might have happened to Julia stirred an inward frenzy. Had he embroiled Julia in the terrible net being woven about him by the Corsair?

Had those fiends some way of listening in on his telephone calls, and had they heard his conversation with the girl? If so, they knew of the appointment, and probably had kidnapped her. Were they following him now?

In a small restaurant he stepped into another telephone-booth and called Mrs. Moore. The lawyer, Mr. Elzivir Curts, had arrived, and Seagrove asked to speak with him.

"See here, young man," the old attorney admonished, "it's time that you tell just what you know about this."

"What do you mean, Mr. Curts?"

"It was very unusual, most unusual, sir—you asking Julia to meet you in the park, after dark. And now Julia is missing. What does this mean, young man?"

Seagrove, who knew the lawyer—he and his father had been friends—meditated a moment. He had to reveal his own plight, so that her mother and friends could act speedily in Julia's case.

"Well, Mr. Curts," he said, "I'm in a jam. I can't talk about it on the telephone, and—and I can't go up there to see you. But I will give you a hint. I'll mention a name, and you can see what I mean. It's a name that's been in the papers a lot. Listen—I mean the Corsair."

There was a dead silence on the wire. Arthur could imagine the horrified look that must have crossed the old gentleman's face.

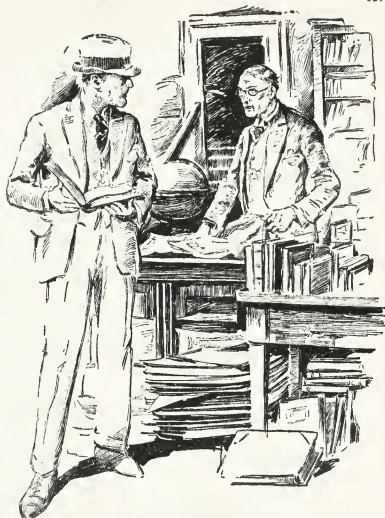
"Do—do you mean, Arthur, that—that he has a hand in this?"

"Yes, Mr. Curts—that's exactly what I mean."

"He has been after Julia?"

"No, I don't mean that. He has been after me, since shortly after noon. I meant to go into hiding, and I think I gave him the dodge from my apartment house. I wanted to talk to Julia. You can see why I asked her to meet me in

The old fellow was certainly studying Seagrove sharply. His eyes burned behind glasses with ancient octagonal rims. . . . "You have very good taste in books," he was saying.



the park. I thought we could meet and have a few minutes' talk without danger—and then, I was going to do something. But we didn't meet. I was there all right, but Julia didn't appear. I'm as worried as you are—more, I can tell you! Nobody could worry any more about Julia than I am doing. I think you'd better notify the police—tell them just what I've told you."

"I'm going to do just that, Arthur," responded the lawyer after a moment. "You are in a serious predicament, I am afraid. If you are sure that they do not know your whereabouts now, I advise you to go into hiding immediately. But keep in touch with me. I shall be here until Julia is found."

"Yes sir—I'll keep in touch with you as long as I can."

"I'll communicate at once with the police commissioner, Arthur. I advise you to get a gun as quickly as you can. Avoid crowds. Watch every man that

approaches you. I wish— Listen, Arthur, I have an idea! Why don't you go immediately to the Tombs, and ask to be locked up until we can run these scoundrels to earth. I'll telephone the keeper at the Tombs—"

"No, Mr. Curts," Seagrove cut in. "That might save me, but not Julia—if she is in their hands. I shall be as busy as the police, only I'm going to keep away from the police. They'll be watching for me to show up perhaps, at the home of some friend, or at headquarters, or some police station. But I'm going to fool them. I'm going it alone!"

"Well, perhaps you're right," Mr. Curts agreed. "But don't fail to let me hear from you, as often as you can."

"I won't, sir."

In the street again, Seagrove's helplessness came in upon him in a melancholy rush. There had been in his mind a certain plan, but the mystery of Julia Moore's disappearance had scattered

that. He should, however, follow that plan, as much for Julia's sake as his own. He wandered about a little, thinking.

It had seemed to him that the depredations committed by the Murder Master, who called himself Jitli, the Corsair of Manhattan, and his crew could be traced into whatever quarter of the city most frequented by the Eurasian population. There was hardly a race upon earth that was not represented in cosmopolitan New York.

But Seagrove thought that he might, through bribery—and that had been the reason he brought along the fifty thousand dollars—get hold of some compatriot of Heri-Moo who would work with him; who would consent to give him at least as much of an insight as he could into his people and their habits in the city. A shrewd man with fifty thousand dollars to spend might accomplish much. And yet—who were the villain's compatriots? A mongrel, the man was, evidently, with a mixture of Mongolian and Caucasian blood.

Seagrove's chances of success were slim, certainly, but his life was now at stake, and the girl he loved was probably in the hands of the killers.

He went back to his room in the little hotel. The night clerk took him up in a wobbly elevator.

Seagrove opened the closet door, to hang up his coat and cap. He glanced into a corner of the closet, thinking of the little leather case, containing fifty thousand dollars' worth of bank-notes.

The case was gone!

CHAPTER V

S EAGROVE'S hope of having thrown the Corsair's agents off his trail fled at that moment.

He turned quickly, bent and peered under the bed. There was no intruder in the room. He had locked the door with the key and also pushed in a strong bolt, when he first came inside.

Some one had entered that room without breaking the lock, for he was positive of having locked the door when he went out. It was a flimsy lock, he had noticed, and operated by a key that would be easy of duplication.

He lifted the window and looked out. There was no fire-escape anywhere near his window—nothing but the flat side of the hotel, three stories down to the street, and no ledge or cornice as a foot-

hold for a prowler. The thief had come and gone through the door.

Seagrove paced the floor. There was a possibility, even a strong probability, that the money had been stolen by some one not connected with the Corsair. Hotel prowlers, snooping from room to room, were common enough.

But it was safer to proceed upon the assumption that one of the Murder Master's men had been on his trail. A man engineering such a wholesale plot in plunder and murder as the Corsair would have at his command any number of fellows skillful in the arts of shadowing.

Seagrove was roused from the uneasy sleep into which he had at length fallen by a knocking upon his door. He sat up in bed, mystified.

There was no good reason for that knock. None of his friends were aware of his whereabouts.

Yet the knock sounded again; and now that Seagrove was fully awake, he detected in it a slow, guarded furtiveness—as though the knocker wanted only the occupant of the room to hear. He got out of bed and stepped to the door.

"Who is it?"

"Buddy," said a cautious voice close to the crack of the door, "I aint got the heart to do it."

"Do what?"

"Well, you know. Open the door. I'll be a friend o' your'n from now on. I got the stuff right here—an' you can have it back."

There was an earnest quality in the voice, an indefinable note that reassured him. He decided to take a chance—but be ready with his fists.

He opened the door, guardedly, and peeped out. A strange-looking individual confronted him—a middle-aged man, with about as tough a face as he had ever seen. His nose had been broken and healed crookedly. One ear was about twice as thick as the other. He was not a man whom anyone would associate with such an enterprise as was being conducted by the Corsair. It might be easy enough to imagine this fellow as a burglar or as a stick-up man, but never as a participant in such subtle crime as Heri-Moo committed.

But—he carried Seagrove's little leather case.

The young man opened the door wider and stepped back. As the visitor hulked into the room, Seagrove said:

"Now, keep at arm's-length away from me, if you don't want trouble. Put the

case on the floor. Shut the door and stand with your back against it. Don't—come—near—me!"

The newcomer stared in amazement. His heavy jaw dropped. The friendly grin disappeared.

"Say-y-y!" he began. "What's the idee, buddy? Think I come here to put on some rough stuff? Not me! I come 'cause I played a dirty stunt on you las' night. It aint in my line, see—friskin' an A-one guy—an' I lugged the kale back. Wha'd you think—I come fer more?"

"I'm not taking any chances," Seagrove responded. "I can't afford to."

"Oh, I know, buddy. Maybe you think I'm a dick, eh—an' lugged back an empty case—but you're wrong. Wrong! The hull works is there. If that dough is A-one—an' I can't believe it yet—well, you might slip me a few hundred fer bein' so honest. Outside o' that, I don't want nothin'—not nothin'."

Seagrove continued to size him up.

"I know you're an A-one guy," the caller went on, "an' when I seen you dashin' around town—in an' out o' taxicabs, in an' out o' telephone-booths—I got you right, see. I heeled you. I knowed you'd lifted some stuff, an' was makin' it away—so thinks I, here's me, just outa stir, with about six dollars to my name, an' nothin' in sight. There's an A-one guy that's hottin' it with the swag. He might need help, says I. I'll horn in, an' see if I can't do somethin' to earn a piece o' his change. When the clerk took you up in the elevator, I moseyed in an' got your room number off the register. Thinks I, I'll call on that lad—tell him the fix I'm in, an' maybe he'll le' me do somethin' to drag down some dough. Lotsa times when I was heavy with the sugar I sweetened fellas that was broke. So I sneaked up to this room an' knocked. No answer. I knocked again, an' spoke, sayin' I was a friend. But you didn't answer. Well, I out with my slip-key an' opened the door. I was des'prate then. My six bucks was gone. Flat, I was! I couldn't think straight. I guess it's 'cause I been in stir twelve years. My head's twisted. Anyhow, in I come. I grabbed that case out o' the closet, an' away I went! Down in a lodgin'-house I pinned the lock of it open—an' it looked like I'd just robbed Henry Ford. I never seen that much dough in my life! It scairt me. I'm still scairt, I guess—or I wouldn't of come back. I aint slep' a wink. If the cops ever found that dough on me, up I'd go fer life! If

they couldn't prove I stole it, they'd fix it somehow to git me put away. Well—what're you lookin' at me so funny fer—uh?"

There was a strange look on the face of young Arthur Seagrove. As this man talked the mystery of the stolen fifty thousand faded away into thin air. Once again reassurance came to him that he had probably succeeded in throwing the Murder Master's men off his trail. Furthermore, if this man was what he said—and there didn't seem the slightest doubt of it—he would be a valuable help.

"Well," Seagrove said, in reply to the question, "I look funny, I suppose, because it's a surprise to have a man return fifty thousand dollars that he's grabbed and made away with."

THE man removed his hat, scratched his bullet-shaped head.

"You aint no more surprised 'n I am," he rejoined. "I guess I'm nuts! I must of been nuts or I wouldn't of took it in the first place. I'm an A-one guy myself, fella. On the square, I am!"

"I believe you are."

"I was anyhow—but I guess twelve years in stir kinda makes me loony." He looked at the case and back at Seagrove.

"Say," he demanded, "is that *real* kale?"

"Sure. It's real money."

"Well, it looked good, but I couldn't believe it. I didn't even dare to change one o' them bills. They're phony, thinks I, queer. If I git nailed shovin' a queer bill, it's life fer me. Once more, an' I'm a fourth offender. That's life, buddy. Thinks I, I'll see if that young fella's still in that room. If he is, I'll hand the stuff back, an' ast him fer—"

"You don't have to beg for a thing. You're welcome to what you want. What's your name?"

"Moxey—Alfred Moxey. But nobody ever calls me Alfred—just plain Moxey. Maybe you—"

"Listen!"

The roar of an elevated train had subsided, and through the open window came the strident cry of a newsboy.

"All about the Corsair pursuin' a millionaire an' kidnagin' a society girl! Polper here—poiper! Corsair pursues millionaire—"

The cry became unintelligible.

"Listen, Moxey—go out and get the papers for me, will you?"

"Sure thing!"

There was a sharp look in Moxey's eyes. He too had heard that boy's cry.

It was in the papers, under big headlines. The flight of Arthur Seagrove, the young millionaire, and his announcement over the telephone to Elzivir Curts, the lawyer, that he was being pursued by emissaries of Jitli, the Corsair of Manhattan. The disappearance of Julia Moore the society girl—and there, on the first page of one paper, side by side, were their pictures. It was probable that Julia Moore had been kidnaped. The stricken mother, and the city as well, waited anxiously the expected demand for ransom—or worse news.

But there was an astounding piece of news in the papers for Seagrove, something beyond what he already knew.

The Corsair had written another of his letters, special delivery, to the police department. The post office had delivered it out of hours when a clerk came across it in the mails, noticing the bold scrawl, "*From the Corsair*," across the top of the envelope. It had reached the department about the time of Elzivir Curts' call.

There was the letter, reproduced in every morning paper, two of them exhibiting photostatic copies. It read:

Arthur Seagrove is doomed. It has been so decreed. Nothing can save him. Wall him about with policemen, encase him in armor—and still the deadly clot will find its way to his heart. He missed the life vouchsafed him by the golden sun. He allowed it to go down in darkness without his tribute, and down into darkness he too shall go. When he topples and falls, let it be a warning to all. The Corsair must have the gold he demands!

This was the most brazen declaration ever made by the Murder Master. He had never before publicly pronounced the doom of any man, but had slain his man and then sent his letter afterward.

MOXEY was reading one paper. He finished the Corsair's letter.

"Holy smokes, young fella! You gotta do somethin'!"

"That's what I have, Moxey. Now listen: you know now who I am. I'm going to make a proposition to you—"

"Don't waste no time with propositions, young fella!" Moxey cut in. He had snapped up out of his chair. One hand clutched the paper. The other big fist was clenched so fiercely that the knuckles gleamed white. "I'm your man!" he added.

They shook hands. Seagrove realized the vital value of this partnership.

"You know the East Side well, don't you, Moxey?"

"There's only one place I know better," was the reply, "and that's Sing Sing."

"We've got to have guns, Moxey."

"Well now, Mr. Seagrove—that's a job that aint so easy, buyin' a gun if you aint got a permit. If I try anything like that—well, like I told you, I'm a fourth offender the next time a jury says guilty."

"No jury is going to say guilty. Anything you do in this case, Moxey, is a piece of police work, and—"

"I—I don't wanta do no police work. Don't call it that, young fella. It don't set well. Me an' the police never did git along, an' what I'm doin' is fer a young fella that I kinda took a likin' to when I first seen him—an' like better now, because he had the nerve to tell them da-goes he wouldn't pay! I'm helpin' you, an' not the police."

"All right, Moxey. Your prejudices don't alter the main point. Let's get busy. First we've got to have break-fast—then guns. Now you understand all about the Corsair, don't you?"

"Sure! I been readin' all that stuff in the papers fer months and months. We guys in stir been talkin' a lot about the Corsair. He aint our kind, an'—"

"Have you any ideas about him, Moxey? Any of your friends ever said he might be some one they knew?"

"No—no. I aint got no idee who he is. No more'n you have. If I did, I'd say so—but I aint."

"He's a maniac," Seagrove suggested, "some foreigner who's gone crazy, and got a gang together, for stealing and murder. The first job he did turned out all right, and he's kept it up. He must be crazy, or he wouldn't write all those letters."

"That's part o' the game, young fella. Don't you see—the killin's an' them letters got the town scairt. That's the game. You git a town scairt once, an' you can do just about like you want. The fellas he goes after now just wilt right away, an' pay. I'll bet there's a bunch of 'em that're payin' an' never mentionin' it to the police."

"That's my idea, Moxey."

"An' somehow folks git the idee that a furriner's a lot worse'n a white man when he gits started on a killin' spree. See what I mean?"

"What do you mean, Moxey?"

"Well—this Corsair guy might not be a furriner a-tall. He might be a white



Seagrove shifted Bow-litt's heavy cane to his left hand, concealing the movement behind the desk.

man, an American—just like me an' you."

"But I saw one of them, Moxey," Seagrove explained. "He called on me. He was certainly a foreigner—a Moor, he called himself, just as Jitli describes himself as a Moor. But he's apparently of mixed race—"

"Well, I don't know nuthin' about them dagoes, but I'm just sayin' that some smart white man, an American maybe—what's to keep him from gittin' a few o' them dagoes around him, an' then startin' somethin' like this? Y'u can bet he's got an idee that folks'd be scairt if they thought they was up against furriners like that."

"You may be right."

"I knowed a crook one time that didn't have nobody but Chinamen in his gang. They pulled some funny stuff—myst'ry stuff—an' the police was runnin' around in circles. They couldn't figger the Chinks like they can white men. But it was a white man that cooked up all the games the Chinks played. There was a killin' or two, an' a whole lot o' stealin'—but the white man got too cocky. He tried bigger an' bigger stuff—till he crashed."

"Your idea sounds reasonable, Moxey."

It certainly was a stroke of rare fortune that brought Alfred Moxey, crook,

to Arthur Seagrove. The invaluable aid that Moxey could render was indicated from the outset.

"Now you don't want even the cops to locate you," said he. "If they git a-hold o' you, you'll hafta take orders from 'em. All right. First thing, then, is not to look like Arthur Seagrove. That's easy. Yank that cap down on the side o' yer head—look tough. Kinda keep yer mouth screwed around, an' one eye squinted. That's it. You don't look much like that picture in the paper now. Kinda drop yer shoulders when you walk, an' hang yer head. Fine! An' don't forget it."

Moxey consented to get the guns; he knew of places where guns were sold illegally. And he soon came back with two automatic pistols, and cartridges.

They concealed the fifty thousand dollars by pulling tacks out of the carpet in one corner, laying the carpet back, spreading the bills out widely and thinly, so that there would be no bulge, then replacing the carpet. Then they set out, Moxey following as a bodyguard.

It was a curious experience for Seagrove, slouching along the street like a young tough. And then they heard the newsboys again, calling their first editions of the evening papers.

"Corsair demands a million fer the life of society girl!"

CHAPTER VI

THE demand had been made upon Julia's mother.

It was the boldest and most extravagant *coup* yet engineered by the Murder Master. The ego that possesses every criminal after a series of successes, had bounded to dizzy heights.

Sundown that very day was the limit set for payment of the ransom.

"Any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood or the release of a soul from its habitation of flesh must be concluded, or at least the bargain closed, before sunset of the day upon which it is begun."

The fateful words of Heri-Moo had been repeated in the letter which had reached Julia's mother. She was prostrated. The lawyer, Elzivir Curts, was acting for the Moores. He was in close consultation with the police commissioner. Detectives, regulars and reserves, were combing the city.

The letter of the Corsair revealed that Julia Moore never would have been disturbed if Arthur Seagrove had paid his own ransom.

In a cigar-store Seagrove went into a telephone-booth, and called the Moore house. He got Elzivir Curts.

"I've just read the news in the paper," Seagrove said. "The million they demand is guaranteed. Pay it, or make arrangements to pay it. Scour the banks, and dig up a million dollars in cash. Leave it wherever they say. I'll pay it."

"Arthur," Mr. Curts begged, "go to the police commissioner immediately. He's scouring the city for you."

"There's nothing I can tell him beyond what he already knows, Mr. Curts. I've got a good chance of keeping them off my trail if I lie low. If I run around with the police, I'll be spotted, and they'll get me as they got the others. My only chance is to keep out of their sight, and I'm starting a detective game of my own today."

He continued to resist all pleadings.

"How do they expect you to pay them the million dollars?" he asked Mr. Curts. "The papers don't say."

"They haven't indicated that as yet," he was told. "All they want today is Mrs. Moore's agreement to pay it. She is to make the announcement in time for the last editions of the evening papers. If her agreement is in those papers, Julia's life will be spared. Then, I suppose, we shall hear from the Corsair

again—with instructions as to how to pay."

"Well, be sure, Mr. Curts, to have that agreement in the evening papers."

"Oh, yes—we have already attended to that, on the advice of the police commissioner. That will be in the papers, though we may decide later not to pay it."

"Don't take any chances. Do everything they ask, even pay the million, if the police can't get Julia before it's time to pay. They'll kill her instantly, if they detect a trick."

"The police commissioner is handling all that."

"I'll be responsible for the million."

That was all Seagrove could do. Just one single clue he had. In his pocket reposed the clipping he had held out from Heri-Moo, the slip of paper with part of an advertisement on the back, with wheels drawn in pencil in the white spaces of it. Somehow, that seemed to be a link with the Corsair.

IN a forlorn hope Seagrove set out with Moxey. If he could find a loitering place of Heri-Moo's race, locate some spot where they gathered, a coffee-house, a tobacco-shop, or a pool-room, a start might be made. So they wandered about the East Side, in and out of places that Moxey suggested, but without revealing to anyone that they were together.

As the hours went by, the futility of this quest bore in upon Seagrove. Not one man did they see who might, from the looks of him, be said either to belong to Heri-Moo's race or to have anything in common with him. Seagrove began to realize that his only hope was to let Heri-Moo find him, and then, through Moxey, turn the tables upon the Eurasian.

The best thing to do, he decided, was to return to the neighborhood of his up-town apartment or to the vicinity of Julia Moore's home, and there loiter about until Heri-Moo or some other member of the Corsair's gang should sight him. Seagrove and Moxey would remain apart, within sight of each other. In brief Seagrove himself was to be the bait that would draw out one of the killers; and then Moxey was to get busy.

It seemed a good idea. It got better and better in Seagrove's mind as he wandered along the Bowery, on the way back to the hotel. He stopped occasionally to gaze into shop-windows and to take furtive looks at Moxey.

But on one occasion he did not see Moxey.

This disturbed him; he did not think Moxey had deliberately given him the slip. But had Moxey got a clue, had he stumbled upon some one in the street crowds, and then gone off on a mission of his own, with no time or chance to notify his employer?

Finally Seagrove returned to the little hotel and waited.

AT twenty minutes past four Moxey came in, breathless.

"I seen a funny-lookin' guy followin' you," he said.

"Following me—where?"

"In the Bowery, an' along the avenue. He followed you right to this hotel, on the other side o' the street. He seen you stop in the doorway, an' when you come inside he hopped in a taxi an' beat it. I hopped in a taxi too, an' beat it right after him."

"See where he went?"

"Yeah, I guess so. He got outa the taxi in Ninth Avenue, an' walked up the street a ways, two or three doors. Then he come up missin', while I was payin' my driver off. But my eyes were off'm him fer only a coupla seconds. I been hangin' around over there, hopin' he'd show up again, but—"

"That's close enough, Moxey. If you've got him located within a block, if he disappeared in some building in that block—why, we'll run him down. But tell me—what'd he look like?"

"Well, he looked like that guy you told me about. Little, with a face that was kinda black and still wasn't black. You know what I mean."

"Yes—swarthy. How was he dressed?"

"Like a dude, all spick and span—with gaiters."

Seagrove nodded and said: "That sounds good, Moxey. And you're sure he was following me?"

"That's a cinch. He's good, too, on the shadow. He kep' outa yer sight. I kep' outa yer sight, too—afraid maybe you'd do sump'n' to tip me off to him."

"That's all right, Moxey. I guess maybe they've been on my trail right along. I'll bet they've been on my heels all day, but just didn't get a chance to slip the works to me. He saw me come into the hotel here, and decided I'd stay in the room awhile. Then he went back to report. Moxey, if we can locate the place where he made his report—"

"I can show you that block in Ninth

Avenue where he come up missin'. Guess maybe we c'n figger sump'n' out."

"That's what we can, Moxey. Let's go!"

They went together this time, in a taxi from which they disembarked two squares from the block they sought. On the way Moxey described the business establishments in that block—a cigar-store on the south corner, a fruit-store, a haberdashery, a vacant shop, a second-hand bookshop, a delicatessen, a shoe-repairing place and so on. At intervals, Moxey said, there were stairways leading to the dwelling flats above. It was in lower Ninth Avenue, traversed by the elevated, a gloomy, littered section of the city.

From across the street, Seagrove studied the buildings that interested him. He had an idea that Heri-Moo, if it was Heri-Moo that Moxey had trailed, had disappeared up one of the stairways. He could not conceive of any of those little shops as being the lair of the Murder Master. He hardly knew where to start in, but an idea did come to him, as he studied the heavily laden rack in front of the bookshop. He could visit that establishment, and probably get into conversation with the proprietor. From him he could get perhaps an idea of some of the families that lived in the shabby flats overhead.

Was Julia Moore being held captive behind some of those murky windows? The thought sent Seagrove across the street swiftly. Moxey was stationed at a vantage-point in the street.

ENOCH BOWLITT
Books Rare and Modern.

That was the legend on the window toward which Seagrove headed.

BUT despite the urge that was upon him from the thought that he might at this moment be within striking distance of Julia's place of captivity, he did not forget that he was dealing with death—the man in the subway car, another in the crowded lobby of a theater, a third at the telephone in his own apartment, the fourth in his own home!

So Seagrove was alert as he crossed the street. It was a dingy little shop that he peered into. First he stopped at the rack on the sidewalk and studied the volumes thereon. It was a good chance to loiter, and to study the street throngs for the sinister face of Heri-Moo.



Arthur Seagrove was the first to reach Julia's side.

Moxey was studying faces, too—and watching windows.

Enoch Bowlitt—an odd name; it had the tang of the sea in it. He could imagine a sailor on an old clipper ship having the name of Enoch Bowlitt. He stepped into the shop. Mr. Bowlitt should prove an interesting individual.

Mr. Bowlitt came forward. There were no other customers.

He was a withered old fellow, but his bent form told of younger days when he probably looked tall and strong. His face had a grizzled power in it; his eyes were bright and searching. He wore a faded suit and a wing collar with a large tie, dark and plain.

"I'm interested in sea stories," said Seagrove.

"Well, young man," said the slow, cracked voice of Enoch Bowlitt, "I have a few."

He thrust his bony head out. His eyes were very bright.

"Back this way, sir."

He led the way toward the rear, stopped at a row of shelves and said: "I have my shop pretty well spaced off, sir. I can lay my hands on any kind of a book I have without much hunting. On these six shelves you will find sea stories. Pirate stories in plenty, if it's thrills you're after. Phœnician pirates, Carthaginian pirates, Moors, Romans, all those fellows who ravaged the Mediterranean. And here we are,"—running a gnarled finger along a certain row—"the Spanish Main! Anything you might want, sir. Help yourself."

"Thank you. Ah, you seem to be interested in the sea, too."

"I am."

The old fellow was certainly studying Seagrove sharply, but that was probably just his way. His eyes burned behind glasses that provided another ancient touch—with their octagonal rims.

"I followed the sea," he added brusquely, and went back to his desk.

Seagrove had a scheme. He would

manifest a keen interest in Enoch Bowlitt's adventures, draw him into friendly talk and slip in questions about the neighborhood.

The ends of the shelves in question ran down to the desk, but Seagrove was just now at the other end of them. He did not see the outspread newspaper on Enoch Bowlitt's desk—a paper from which the likenesses of Arthur Seagrove and Julia Moore looked up.

Mr. Bowlitt got up, wandered out a rear door and closed it behind him. Seagrove divided his glances between the titles on the shelves and the face of Moxey in the street. He was hoping Moxey would again spot Heri-Moo, and signal him.

Mr. Bowlitt returned to the shop, sat down at his desk again, folded the newspaper and laid it aside.

Seagrove engaged him in conversation, and Mr. Bowlitt thawed. He came around and stood at the shelves with his customer. They talked very pleasantly now. Seagrove tried out a few questions about the people in the neighborhood who bought books, and got friendly answers. He glanced through the window at Moxey occasionally.

Presently Bowlitt excused himself and walked to the front of the store. He stood in the doorway, looking into the street. From somewhere he summoned a man, and that fellow stepped inside, dragged the shutters from behind a row of shelves, and outside again, began to put them up at the windows.

Mr. Bowlitt was old-fashioned in that respect, too, it appeared. He still used the old-time shutters at his windows.

HE returned to Seagrove, who was now near the desk.

"Don't be in a hurry, young man," he said. "I'm catching an evening train for Philadelphia, but there's no hurry. Take your time."

"Thank you."

Seagrove meant to go before the shutters excluded the visage of Moxey. Mr. Bowlitt began to look at the volumes his customer had picked out, and seemed to be calculating their price. There was a gaslight above the desk. Seagrove's glance fell upon the large blotter below it.

"You have very good taste in books," Bowlitt was saying.

Seagrove stared at the blotter, sideways, doubting the evidence of his own eyes:

Some one in a meditative frame of mind had drawn at least a score of little wheels upon the blotter.

The same design that was twice repeated upon the clipping Seagrove had in his pocket!

The Corsair—the Murder Master!

CHAPTER VII

A TREMOR, a chill shudder, rippled over the young man's flesh from head to foot—the reaction of surprise and the sudden realization that he was perhaps trapped in the lair of the killer. He turned, with a show of casualness. But as he turned, Enoch Bowlitt moved—moved with a new and astonishing speed. Before Seagrove could make a move to defend himself, the pistol had been snatched from its amateurish concealment in his hip pocket, and Bowlitt had darted with it behind a table piled high with books.

The shutters were up. The door was locked. The fellow who had put up the shutters, and who evidently had been standing guard somewhere in the street, was meandering back toward Seagrove, a mirthless grin on his face. Seagrove was trapped. And now Heri-Moo himself appeared.

The Eurasian came into the shop by way of the rear door. He glanced at Seagrove—and then did an astonishing thing: Swiftly, he moved toward the big fellow coming from the front. He was very sly about it, a serpent gliding toward unsuspecting prey, for the man's attention was fixed on Seagrove. Suddenly Heri-Moo was at the big man's side, and his right hand performed a darting movement. And instantly the big fellow's face turned from a visage of menace against Seagrove to a staring mask of horror. A yell escaped his lips, and died down to a gurgle in his throat. Then he fell.

Seagrove had meanwhile seized the only weapon at hand, Enoch Bowlitt's heavy walking-stick, from a corner behind the desk. He had no time to speculate as to why Heri-Moo had inflicted his mysterious death-thrust upon a man who, by all the evidence, was a fellow-conspirator. For Heri-Moo was coming at him now—Heri-Moo, and death!

It lurked in his hand. The evidence lay on the floor, for the big fellow was clearly dead. The strange Eurasian had made only a slight movement toward

him, from the side, a mere touch. Yet there he lay, dead.

The crooked grin was on Heri-Moo's face. There was murder in that grin.

What could he expect to do, that tiny little man? Well, what had he done to five men already, one just a moment ago? He had killed them in a twinkling. So sure of the result was Enoch Bowlitt that he stood placidly behind the table of books. But his face had turned as murderous as Heri-Moo's. He watched this game of life and death, rapt. It was the face of a maniac!

Seagrove crouched, determined if possible to strike down this monster. The odds would not be so great if Moxey would only show up. What had become of the man?

CLOSER and closer the little Eurasian was coming, watching his chance. It seemed to Seagrove that if he removed his eyes from the black, glistening orbs of Heri-Moo for the space of a wink, the secret death would strike him. But he remembered one important thing: Heri-Moo's movement toward the fellow dead on the floor had been with his right hand. And so Seagrove shifted the cane to his left, crouching yet, concealing the movement behind the desk.

Then he leaped suddenly and struck with the heavy cane—not at Heri-Moo's head, but at his right hand. The blow cracked.

This was a signal that filled that little bookshop with violent movement. Heri-Moo howled, and grabbed his injured right hand with his left. Seagrove sprang over the desk, and while Heri-Moo strove to get in close, for that brief but fatal thrust, beat savagely at his hands with the cane.

A tiny object gleamed on the floor. Seagrove stepped on it as Heri-Moo reached for it, and then laid out the Eurasian with a crack on the head.

The fury of sound brought the scream of a woman. It was muffled by distance and by partitions, yet it had the effect of turning Seagrove into a wild man.

Julia!

Somewhere in that place, above or below, Julia Moore was held captive. She screamed again, and Seagrove shouted in answer.

But he had no chance to go to her then; for a rear door burst open, and three yellow-faced men, evidently mongrels like Heri-Moo, rushed in; and each carried a purposeful pistol.

In a desperate attempt to strike at his enemies separately, Seagrove leaped at Enoch Bowlitt in a flying football tackle. Bowlitt fired but missed; and the two came to the floor together. The old man was no match for Seagrove, who quickly wrested the weapon from him, and then struggled to his feet, claspings Bowlitt close to him as a shield.

Then it was that Seagrove learned the temper of this desperate crew. For after a brief hesitation and a swift interchange in their own tongue, the three in the rear leveled their pistols and began firing. At once Bowlitt went limp in Seagrove's clasp, seriously hurt, it was apparent. And though Seagrove answered his enemies' fire, his living—or dying—shield hampered him; and he would doubtless have quickly lost the battle but for the help that now came.

For the front door was burst open with a crash; Moxey sprawled in with it, and after him came the police, with drawn guns. The firing redoubled; and then—

A sudden silence. . . . Enoch Bowlitt had slipped limply to the floor. And the swarthy criminals who had not hesitated to sacrifice him lay there also, dead or wounded.

ARTHUR SEAGROVE, jamming his way ahead of the police up the stairway that led off a passage to Enoch Bowlitt's flat above, was the first to reach the side of Julia Moore. She had been tied hand and foot and bound to a heavy chair, when word came up to her guards that Seagrove was in the bookshop below.

She stood up for a moment after her thongs were cut, and then fell forward into Seagrove's arms. In just a few moments she regained her strength sufficiently to go to the telephone, and to give the news to her mother. . . .

As Julia and Seagrove sped uptown in a taxi, they heard newsboys shouting in the streets:

"Corsair captured! Julia Moore rescued by Seagrove! Extra—extra! All about the capture of the Murder Master!"

But they returned to police headquarters that night, at the behest of the commissioner. Detectives were scouring the city, running down all possible leads respecting Enoch Bowlitt and Heri-Moo, and phoning in their reports. Julia and Seagrove, in the office of the commissioner, the door of which was besieged by reporters, were apprised of these re-

ports as fast as they came in. All the devices known to the police were being employed to wring confessions from Heri-Moo and the two wounded Eurasians captured in the bookshop. One of the latter was dead; and Bowlitt lay unconscious in a hospital.

It developed that Moxey had held some conversation with the man left on guard by Heri-Moo; and the Eurasian, from a window upstairs, saw this. He instantly leaped to the conclusion that his man had betrayed him, and that he had brought Arthur Seagrove and his bodyguard to the bookshop. So Heri-Moo killed his own man as quickly as he could, killed him while the fellow really was bent on slaying Seagrove.

THE report from the medical examiner was read to Julia and Seagrove:

"From the hypodermic syringe found broken on the floor of the bookshop the laboratory recovered a few drops of fluid, of which tests have been made. It is a poison, name unknown. It forms a clot the instant it is introduced into a vein or a capillary, by turning a small amount of blood to a jelly. This clot, reaching the heart a very few seconds later, causes instant death, by stopping valvular action. The poison perhaps is some old secret of some Asiatic people.

"A very small needle was used, so small as to leave no wound. A man armed with such a syringe containing that poison could easily kill a man who was in combat with him. All that was necessary was for him to get close enough to jab with the needle, into any part of the adversary's body. A tiny bit of the poison introduced into the capillaries, that network of connecting ducts between the arteries and the veins, forms a clot in the space of about a second, congealing sufficient blood in the bloodstream to cause death. In perhaps two more seconds the clot reaches the heart, and the victim falls dead. He would have just about time enough, between the pain of the jab and the stoppage of his heart, to cry out and to make a few motions."

That was the Corsair's secret. But who was the Corsair?

"If the man with the real brains is still at large," the commissioner suggested, "perhaps we haven't heard the last of these murders yet. He's just brazen enough to try something, and quickly, too."

But at this point the chief of detectives entered, and after saluting, made his report.

"You may find this hard to believe, Chief," he said, "but this Bowlitt is our Murder Master. He isn't the brains behind the poison plot—that is, he didn't find the poison. That came from Heri-Moo, no doubt. You see Heri-Moo, if starting on a campaign of extortion and murder, would want to find about as safe a place as he could as a retreat. What was safer than that dingy old bookshop?

"The reports we've got in from the Federal authorities say that Bowlitt, as a sailor thirty-seven years ago, was mixed up in a mutiny at sea. He served a few years in prison. After that, by his own admission, he came to New York and worked around the harbor. When his health went back on him, he bought that bookshop.

"His neighbors say he always acted a little cracked, and the young fellow that worked for him up to a year ago says he was a great reader of pirate stories—histories, fiction, and all that. Well, we've copied those notes to the police and the newspapers, on that rickety old typewriter in his shop. There's no question but what they were written on the same machine. Bowlitt's our man!"

ENOCH BOWLITT never recovered consciousness to confess; and Heri-Moo died by his own hand in jail. But a large part of the Murder Master's loot was found hidden in the cellar of the old book-shop; and the weird crimes peculiar to the Corsair of Manhattan have not been repeated. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Seagrove never look upon Cleopatra's Needle, as their car passes through Central Park without recalling that hectic night when they failed to keep their tryst there. And this thought always induces another—of gratitude that they escaped the fate Heri-Moo had in store for them.

On these motor-excursions the car is usually driven by their chauffeur, and man-of-all-work, Alfred Moxey. *Usually*, we say; for Moxey succumbs now and then—at rarer and rarer intervals, be it said to his credit—to the lure of habits formed long ago. But upon these occasions he comes back so earnestly repentant that forgiveness follows as a matter of course.